

## **Oral History Cover Sheet**

**Name:** Michael Field

**Date of Interview:** August 6, 2010

**Location of Interview:** Randolph, New Hampshire

**Interviewer:** Mark Madison

**Brief Summary of Interview:** Michael Field was born January 20, 1948 in Portland Maine. His father mainly sold insurance and his mother was a housewife. Growing up in rural Maine, a lot of his time was spent doing outdoor activities such as wandering the woods and going to the family cabin on the lake. He grew up in Phillips, Maine and went to school there until his parents decided to send him to Exeter. He went to MIT then, to graduate school and eventually got his Ph.D. in geology at The University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He worked as a caretaker for Crag Camp in the summers of 1957 and 1958. He discusses how he got the job and how he had never been to the White Mountains before this. He talks about what a typical day was like for him, some of the people that came up, his experiences in general and he shares some stories about his time there like the one he calls 'The long Day' and his 42 mile hike. He really enjoyed his time at the RMC and he remembers being at Crag Camp thinking, "Right now is a really good time."

**Mark:** Well the first question is easy; can you say and spell your name for the transcriptionist?

**Michael:** I'm Michael T. Field. M I C H A E L T. F I E L D.

**Mark:** Thanks. And today is August 6, 2010 and we're in Randolph, New Hampshire and the voices you might hear on the tape would be Steve Chase or Mark Madison. And Michael the next question is almost as easy, where and when were you born?

**Michael:** I was born in Portland, Maine on January 20, 1938.

**Mark:** Ok and what did your parents do?

**Michael:** My father did miscellaneous things. He worked for the state for a short while but then he worked with his father, which is something that's always staggered me. I can't imagine any body working with their father.

**Mark:** And then...

**Michael:** But his father—mostly sold insurance. There was also a real estate dealing and in his time his father had worked for the bank and the railroad and the steamboat line and had his finger on almost any place where there was a buck to be made. My father mainly sold insurance. My mother was a classic housewife.

**Mark:** As a young boy what outdoor activities did you do?

**Michael:** When you grow up in rural Maine, everything is outdoor activity. And then when I got big enough to wander in the woods, I wandered in the woods with some friends and my brother. And we also had a family cabin on the lake and we spent a lot of time there.

**Mark:** Okay and where did you go to school?

**Michael:** I grew in the town of Phillips in western Maine, so I went through school there. That was a time where you could go from kindergarten through high school and be with the same kids all along the way, there were about 15 in each class.

**Mark:** And then how...?

**Michael:** And then my parents thought I should go somewhere else for school, I don't know if they were right or not but they sent me to Exeter for a few years. You want to go on from there?

**Mark:** Sure go ahead.

**Michael:** After that I went to MIT and then graduate school, Caltech, although that didn't work out so well. And then I dropped out for several years and then I went back and got my doctorate at The University of Massachusetts at Amherst. This is all in geology.

**Mark:** In geology, okay. We just had a geologist here earlier. A generation removed from you I think.

**Michael:** Dyk Eusden?

**Steve:** Jonathon...

**Mark:** Jonathon...

**Steve:** Gourley.

**Michael:** Nope, don't know him.

**Mark:** He's a young guy.

**Steve:** He's the next generation past Dyk.

**Michael:** Oh.

**Mark:** All right and then are you married obviously?

**Michael:** Yes.

**Mark:** Do you have any—when did you marry, that's one of our questions?

**Michael:** Which time?

**Mark:** I don't know. Question writer. (Laughing).

**Michael:** I got married in 1969 and had two children.

**Mark:** Okay.

**Michael:** And I got married again in 1997.

**Michael's wife:** '97.

**Michael:** '97.

**Mark:** We didn't mean to put you on the spot. We ask everybody the same question so there's some consistency. What eventually brought you to the RMC to work for the Randolph Mountain Club?

**Michael:** One of the teachers at Exeter had been told to find somebody for Crag Camp. And, you know, I'd written a couple papers about hiking in the woods, he's like "I'll try this guy."

**Mark:** What year...?

**Michael:** That's how I got it.

**Mark:** What year was this Michael?

**Michael:** '57.

**Mark:** 1957 and how old were you at that time?

**Michael:** 19.

**Mark:** Okay. So what did you do for the RMC?

**Michael:** I was caretaker for Crag Camp in the summer of 1957 and I went back again in the summer of 1958 because I liked it so much.

**Mark:** Okay, same place?

**Michael or Mark:** Crag Camp, both times.

**Mark:** What kind of experience prepared you for the job?

**Michael:** I don't know if they asked if I had any experience for the job, they asked if I was interested. Hiking and camping, I don't think they asked about living in log cabins with wood stoves so, which I had done.

**Mark:** And you wrote some papers on hiking, so you were well set up.

**Michael:** Yeah.

**Mark:** Had you visited the camp before you went to work there?

**Michael:** No.

**Mark:** How did you envision the camp would be?

**Michael:** I'd never been to the White Mountains before.

**Mark:** Really? What did you think it would be like before you saw it?

**Michael:** I can't remember.

**Mark:** That was a long time ago.

**Michael:** It's been erased of what actually happened.

**Steve:** Did you know it was a cabin?

**Michael:** Yeah.

**Steve:** The reason we're asking that question is someone said, someone a few years ago would've got the job at Crag and thought it was just going to be a lean-to and then when they got to Crag they went "OH MY GOSH, LOOK AT THIS PLACE!"

**Mark:** All right.

**Michael:** They don't hire caretakers for a lean-to.

**Steve:** Yeah, right.

**Mark:** What was a typical workday like at the camp for you?

**Michael:** Typical work day back in '57, '58 typical day was nobody showed up.

**Mark or Steve:** No body showed up.

**Michael:** And it's amazing, sometimes two or three days. For the whole summer, I bet I was alone almost half the time. Which makes your schedule very easy if you want to take a long hike the next day. All the people that came were fun.

**Mark:** Do you, do you remember any particular groups or people that came through that got stuck with you over the years?

**Michael:** Well there are two categories, the teenage kids from Randolph that came again and again so I got to know them. And then there were other people hiking through. I don't remember anybody unusually good or bad.

**Mark:** That's probably good.

**Michael:** I remember one that was quite disorganized which she; she's kind of a separate story.

**Mark:** Would you want to share that story with us?

**Michael:** Uh—it's a long story because she was part of a day—it's called the long, I call it 'The long day'. (Says, "I'll check that again" and looks in his journal.) July 24, '57, I didn't leave until eleven in the morning. I mean this day continues until about midnight. So I went up Madison and then down the Howker Ridge Trail, just over the top of Madison at the top of the Howker Ridge, one of the longest trails up this side of the mountains, I ran into this group of 10 campers, they said "Hey mister, where are we?" You might ask that half way up the Amphibrach Trail but at the top of the Howker Ridge Trail, well they were almost up. I went down there through a cloud burst, went to the post office, then over to Chris Goetze and Brian Underhill, they were the trail crew. They stayed in a place, a cabin next to I think it was Anna (name). Okay then I went back up the road a couple of miles. I didn't want to go straight back up to Crag Camp so I took Lowe's Path up to the Log Cabin. It was raining for most of the trip. I started off again up Lowe's Path but after stopping at an intersection I got turned around and took the Randolph Path instead and didn't realize my mistake until I was well along and I hate to turn around so I just kept going.

**Steve:** Did you go left or right there?

**Michael:** I was going up you know...

**Steve:** Yeah.

**Michael:** ...eventually ended up at Crag Camp.

**Steve:** Okay.

**Michael:** So I went to the right, headed in the direction of the Perch.

**Steve:** Yeah.



**Michael:** Yeah went up to the Perch and then started back on the Gray Knob Trail. And I was almost to Gray Knob and I came up behind a woman, who had taken the Randolph Path instead of Gulfside. She was with a group of people, they went this way and she went that way and nobody seemed to care. Anyhow, she walking really slowly, you know usually if I come up behind someone walking slowly and I don't have far to go I change pace, you know. But she was going so slowly, so I said okay see you at Crag Camp. Okay we're not to Crag Camp yet and half way from Gray Knob to Crag Camp is the spring where Crag Camp gets its water. There was a man and two boys who'd been there the night before and the boys had been playing in the stream and knocked the hose out cutting off the water supply at Crag Camp, which is not really, I knew how to fix it, it's not real easy especially when the trees are wet. That summer they put in a new waterline, replaced the iron pipe that, Rolf Goetze may have told you about with the sections of PVC pipe, three to four hundred foot lengths. The way to fix it was to stick the hose back into the stream and then you walk four hundred feet down to the next junction, take out your jackknife cut it out and wait until the water gets going again then you shove it back together and that's the, four hundred feet down is the level so you only need to do it that one place. And it's a tromp through the brush all the way and as I said it was raining earlier. Okay I went back to Crag Camp—and there were a few more people. The woman eventually showed up but of course she did start worrying a little bit about her group, they didn't seem give a damn about her. So I thought okay, this is long before the days of radios and okay I will run over to Madison Hut and tell them, it was only forty minutes but you know it's work and then I had to come back. At Madison Hut the place is packed so I yelled at the top of my voice “Any anybody here know so and so?” Eventually somebody came out of the crowd. I don't remember what we arranged for how they would meet again but anyhow I went back to Crag Camp. [There was no problem with her staying, as there were plenty of extra blankets.] The day's not over. Okay so I got her squared away along with a half dozen people. Everybody goes to bed. About eleven o'clock at night there's a landslide somewhere; you wouldn't believe how long those things can go on. And after it finally stopped, people were in bed but they weren't asleep yet, I got up and said I think I'll step outside and take a look somebody said, “Make sure there's something to step on before you step outside.” I couldn't see

anything. There was a relatively new slide right below Crag Camp that had come down two or three years ago, and I was sure that was it. Though some days later I went down to the slide and that wasn't it, it was something up on the headwall and I couldn't tell for sure and tried to look at pictures I took then and pictures I took later, never knew for sure but boy that was a landslide and it just went on and on and on. And that was the end of the day that started at eleven in the morning at Madison.

**Mark:** Now that was not a typical day.

**Michael:** No.

**Mark:** (Unintelligible).

**Michael:** No that was one of my two long days.

**Mark:** Did you have any favorite hikes or paths when you were up there?

**Michael:** Favorite spot I think is Adams 4.

**Mark:** Okay.

**Michael:** Do you know what I mean?

**Steve:** Yeah.

**Michael:** Yeah.

**Mark:** That was your favorite spot?

**Steve:** That is nice.

**Michael:** Yeah. Anything above tree line.

**Mark:** Okay. Did you have any encounters with wildlife while you were caretaker up there?

**Michael:** Not even mice.

**Mark:** Really.

**Michael:** I know other caretakers have told stories about trapping hundreds of mice, I had some squirrels around. When you've got just a plain roof like at Crag Camp, when a squirrel runs across the roof it sounds just like a squirrel's running across the floor. It's up there and you're looking down. Nothing bigger, not even a skunk or a raccoon.

**Mark:** What was the best part of the job?

**Michael:** It was all really nice you know a lot of times in your life you look back and say "Oh that was a really good time." I remember being at Crag Camp and thinking "Right now is a really good time!" And there aren't many times in your life you can say that. Well it was a good bunch of people, a handful I had some issues with. There were kids from the valley that came up regularly that was nice cuz I knew them.

**Mark:** Right, right.

**Michael:** And the other people that came by were complete strangers were also very nice you know we swapped stories.

**Mark:** What was the worst part of the job?

**Michael:** I don't think there was one. Hauling stuff up was certainly work but I found out after I got in shape that with a sixty-pound pack, it took two hours.

**Mark:** Do you have...?

**Michael:** Of course know I look back and say “I used to go up there with a sixty pound pack.” Then my inner voice says, “What did you weigh then?” Well it’s about the same. (Everyone laughing).

**Mark:** Did you have much contact with the AMC or the Forest Service when you were up there?

**Michael:** No I remember running into a, I remember running into a ridge runner once on top.

**Mark:** Okay.

**Michael:** But that was after my brother was working for the Forest Service in Gorham. AMC, I remember once in some kind of crude looking guys came in and slouched down on the couch in the middle of the day and said, “Any of the goofers leave some lemonade?” [AMC employees used the term “goofer” for any hiker that was not one of them.] So they must have been AMC.

**Mark:** Did the time you worked in Randolph affect or shape your career or lifestyle decisions that came later?

**Michael:** Don’t think so, you know, I’d run around in the woods before and I ran around the woods after, it was—very nice time but I don’t know, don’t think it bent me one way or another.

**Mark:** What was your most dangerous or frightening experience?

**Steve:** You didn’t ask me that?

**Mark:** We ran out of tape.

**Steve:** Yeah we did.

(Mark laughing)

**Michael:** I think I was above tree line once and a thunderstorm came in but passed over quickly—I even survived the day I tried to wear myself out but I did survive.

**Mark:** Do you recall a humorous experience?

**Michael:** Once there was some project on, so there was a bunch of other people up there, the trail crew and Klaus Goetze and a few other people; they were building something, I forget what. But somebody decided we should have a square dance at Crag Camp, it was all guys. It was hilarious. (Everyone laughing). I did learn something then that I've seen repeated a couple of times, if you are going to have a really, really great party, have people work together on a project for a day first. This is probably why the old barn raisings were so much fun.

**Mark:** Do you have any advice or anything you like to tell others about your time working in the mountains?

**Michael:** No because it's changed. There are a lot more people, there's no stove. How can you welcome people in out of the rain when there's no stove, I mean they're out of the rain, but.

**Michael's wife:** Tell them about your cooking.

**Michael:** Gee you didn't ask that.

**Mark:** We only have some questions; we don't have all the questions. Tell us about your cooking, what did you do on that stove?

**Michael:** It's the first time I've been by myself cooking for myself so I'm, I was not frightened of it, I looked at as an opportunity. And if I woke up and it was you know cold, gray, pouring rain, okay, time to bake stuff. I'd fire up the stove and practice baking cinnamon rolls and what not.

**Mark:** That's great.

**Michael:** That was usually when I was alone, but it's cozier when there are a bunch of people. There was one time we had a whole bunch of people and everybody would, they just wouldn't come and go off, they would hang around during the day and so since I had the stove going to dry everybody out, I said "Oh this is a good time for baking." And there was some guy there that was washing dishes like crazy and I kept putting dishes on the pile and at one point he said, "Wait a minute, I already washed this one." The stove at that time had the oven, and also the water tank on the back, and we changed the valves on the side to change which way the smoke goes up and suddenly you've got ten gallons of boiling water.

**Mark:** Do you have any other reminisces you like to share that we didn't ask about?

**Michael:** I did hook up a shower. Let's see—there was a left over piece of the PVC piping.

**Steve:** We used black pipe.

**Michael:** What.

**Steve:** Was it black?

**Michael:** Black, yeah black, vinyl.

**Steve:** Heats the water real good.

**Michael:** Well there was also, there was a big copper tank up there and hope it's still around somewhere, it was too good to throw away. The old water system had been so leaky they had a tank to store it in and leave that in the sun all afternoon, just fine or you could use the water tank on the back of the stove if it's not too hot. And then you just get the suction going, zoom down the trail about a hundred feet to where I had the shower set up. I introduced a few other people to it. I can remember their faces glowing when they came back "Fantastic, that's great!"

**Mark:** Yeah that was wide open, we're still into wide open, anything else?

**Michael:** Tell you about the, the end of the, tell you about the long hike. At the end of the second summer, I figured I must be in as good as shape as I'm ever going to be, maybe I'll take a long hike. So I left early in the morning, said goodbye to people sleeping on the porch and had left for Mount Washington. Mount Washington would be about a quarter of the way, and continued on down the Crawford Path to Crawford Notch.

**Steve:** (Unclear, speaking low).

**Michael:** Okay. Then I went down on the road for a few miles and came back up on the Davis Path; boy that's a nice path, I can still remember that. It was made for horses so the grade is wonderful; I was a little tired so I appreciated it. I can still remember it. And then about the time I got back above tree line, it started to go dark. I was getting a little tired but then I went around Mount Washington. It was quite dark, the fog was coming in—and went along there, I had cached a flashlight at Edmond's Col, which turned out to be a good idea.

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Michael:** And, at Edmond's Col I was pretty tired, you know, at Gray Knob I thought I'd just go in and sleep for a minute and then I hear people moving around and thought oh well I don't want to disturb them. So I got back to Crag Camp around midnight, said hello to the people sleeping on the porch. (Everyone laughing). As I measure on the map, it was 42 miles.

**Mark:** That's a lot.

**Michael:** Along the crest of White Mountains.

**Mark:** That's pretty good.

**Michael:** And uh—I had a little something to eat after I got back and then threw-up. (Everyone laughing). The next day some friends arrived from Maine to stay a couple days and then take me back home. We went up on Mount Adams, but I was pretty slow.

**Mark:** Yeah, I bet. That's a great story. Anything else you want to share?

**Michael:** Oh and, I don't if it was later or at the time I was thinking, "Let's see, I'm walking at night, in bad weather, above tree line, I'm exhausted and now have violated every rule that's on the sign at the tree line." But when you're that age, you can do it.

**Steve:** Yeah but you were a caretaker so it that was all right.

**Mark:** Anything else you want to share with us Michael?

**Michael:** I don't know what they do now a days in a place without a stove.

**Mark:** Well the critical piece of furniture was the stove.



**Michael:** At that time, there were few enough people; very few people came. Now I know if you're burning wood you have to have somebody there so people don't cut green trees next to the camp. So in my spare time I'd wander around in the woods, there's a fallen tree and there's a fallen tree. When a bunch of kids came up from the village I say, "Okay well it's wood gathering time, let's bring them back." And it was no problem getting enough wood for that day and more and of course the kids thought it was fun. Good thing about kids.

**Mark:** Do you have any questions?

**Steve:** Nope, I'm good.

**Mark:** Well Michael thank you very much. This is an excellent oral history, we will; I enjoyed all your stories. I like the long hike one.

**Michael:** Yeah.

**Mark:** Forty-two miles.